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AUTHOR Lafleur, Clay
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ABSTRACT

Ontario public school systems are responsible for ensuring that Ministry of Education documents, such as subject guidelines, are implemented in their schools. This paper describes an implementation plan developed and used in Simcoe County by a large rural school board with modest program support staff. Four distinct phases characterize this board's Document Implementation Plan: validation, planning, implementation, and review. Each of these phases is discussed in turn, and some of the inevitable tensions that arise when a local jurisdiction attempts to implement centrally developed provincial curriculum standards are also examined. The sources of tension include provincial direction versus local responsibility, collective agreements, shifting financial responsibility to local municipalities, limited resource materials, the large number of documents that must be implemented, the specified timeline, readiness for implementation, and accountability for curriculum implementation. The report concludes with a number of reflections on the implementation process. (TE)

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RESOLVING THE TENSION BETWEEN CENTRALIZED PROVINCIAL DIRECTION AND LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD IMPLEMENTATION OF CURRICULUM STANDARDS

Concerns About Implementing Provincial Curriculum Documents Within A County School Board With Modest Program Support Staff

Clay Lafleur
Simcoe County Board of Education (Canada)

47.24 / RESOLVING THE TENSION BETWEEN CENTRALIZED PROVINCIAL DIRECTION AND LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD IMPLEMENTATION OF CURRICULUM STANDARDS (Symposium, Division H)

CHAIR *Edgar H. Wright, Toronto Board of Education (Canada)*

PARTICIPANTS

An Overview of the Ontario Provincial Educational System, Its Curriculum Guidelines, Evaluation Procedures, and Provisions for Local Autonomy. *Peter Nightingale, Ontario Ministry of Education*

Concerns About Implementing Provincial Curriculum Documents Within a County School Board with Modest Program Support Staff. *Clay Lafleur, Simcoe County Board of Education (Canada)*

Local Development and Use of a Student Evaluation Resource Document in Response to an Unelaborated Ministry Requirement. *Anne E. Berens, Etobicoke Board of Education (Canada)*

A Cooperative Provincial-Local Project to Evaluate Components of a Local System with a View to Initiating Change. *H. J. Dilling, Scarborough Board of Education (Canada)*

DISCUSSANT *S. Stiegelbauer, University of Texas at Austin*

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CONCERNS ABOUT IMPLEMENTING PROVINCIAL CURRICULUM DOCUMENTS WITHIN A COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD WITH MODEST PROGRAM SUPPORT STAFF

Clay Lafleur
Director of Research
Simcoe County Board of Education

Abstract

Ontario school systems have a responsibility for ensuring that Ministry of Education documents, such as subject guidelines, are implemented in its schools. This paper describes an implementation plan developed and used by a large rural school board with modest program support staff. Some of the inevitable tensions that arise when a local jurisdiction attempts to implement centrally developed provincial curriculum standards are also examined. A number of reflections on the implementation process concludes the presentation.

CONCERNS ABOUT IMPLEMENTING PROVINCIAL CURRICULUM DOCUMENTS WITHIN A COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD WITH MODEST PROGRAM SUPPORT STAFF

Ontario school systems have a responsibility for ensuring that Ministry of Education documents, such as subject guidelines, are implemented in its schools. To facilitate this task a Document Implementation Plan was developed in Simcoe County. The first part of the paper describes this Implementation Plan.

To some extent, the shortcomings in the theory guiding implementation activities provoke practical dilemmas that give rise to system and individual tension. The situation is compounded further by a provincial government policy of central direction and local responsibility for implementation. Inevitably, there is a certain imbalance and unresolved opposition. The second part of the paper examines some of these resulting tensions.

Personal reflections about the implementation process are highlighted in the concluding section.

A Description of the Document Implementation Plan

The Document Implementation Plan was developed by the Board's Program Department and Educational Research Services to provide Simcoe County personnel with a clear statement of expectations and procedures for effectively handling Ministry of Education documents. In developing the Plan, the research literature on implementation was consulted. For example, the work of Fullan (1982), Huberman and Miles (1984), Leithwood et al. (n.d.), Pratt (1980), Sarason (1983), and Werner (1980) were examined. In particular, the literature on the concerns-based perspective for implementing instructional change (Rutherford, Hall & Huling, 1983) provided a conceptual basis for the Plan. Close liaison

was maintained with procedures advocated by the Ministry of Education, especially their Document, Implementation and Review model. Use of the Plan is among the Director of Education's long range objectives, thus giving it additional impact in the system.

Principles of Implementation

Several underlying principles of implementation have been identified from the research literature. They are fundamental to the successful adoption and use of the Document Implementation Plan. With limited financial and personnel resources, it is a challenge to ensure that these key principles are translated into school and classroom practice. Some of these basic tenets of the Plan are listed below:

* Time is required for implementation to occur. Implementation is not an event that can be programmed to occur at a specific instant.

* Individuals and groups have different concerns and needs with respect to implementation.

* Implementation means translating all the key requirements and expectations of the documents into school and classroom practice.

* The school principal is a major change agent for implementation.

* There are different levels of implementation that reflect overall familiarization and experience with the document.

* Early implementation is usually difficult and deals with day-to-day coping which involves unsuccessful attempts "to make it work as it is supposed to".

* Assistance, in the forms of in-service training, support groups, and provision of resources, is essential to implementation.

* The school principal must establish a supportive environment that encourages implementation.

* The goals for planning should be clear to all groups.

* Planning should anticipate tasks, roles, and resources necessary to put changes into practice.

* Planning continues as long as implementation continues - the two are inseparable in practice.

* Changes should be clarified by school staff - clarity emerges through actual use.

* Successful implementation requires that staff development opportunities are provided as the need arises.

* Implementation requires adaptation of the change to the local context, including staff experience, needs, interests, and resources.

* Implementation requires staff involvement in decision-making about the change process.

* There should be opportunities for innovative and adaptive use of the document by the teacher.

* Continual feedback and eventual program review are integral parts of the implementation procedure.

Components of the Plan

Four distinct phases characterize the Document Implementation Plan: validation, planning, implementation and review. (See Figure 1)

INSERT FIGURE 1

Validation

The purpose of the validation procedure is not only to prepare a response for the Ministry of Education writing team, but also to initiate a process that alerts teachers to the characteristics of the Ministry's draft document. As many teachers as possible are involved, on a voluntary basis, in the validation process. Through discussion and personal interaction, teachers provide

reactions and suggestions for improving the draft document; they also identify resources and staff development required for eventual implementation of the final document.

Planning

Although the key issues and concerns identified by teachers in the validation stage provide an initial basis for planning, formal Board planning does not begin until the final document arrives from the Ministry of Education. One of the first activities involves an identification of the key requirements and expectations of the document. It is these requirements that form the basis for an eventual program review. Information meetings are then held to communicate these expectations. School activities such as the development of a school implementation plan and the preparation of classroom implementation strategies further identify assistance that will be necessary to support initial implementation efforts.

Implementation

Implementing documents at the school and classroom level is a long-range process occurring over a number of years. It involves translating the key requirements of the final Ministry of Education document into actual practice. Implementation involves coming to terms with the changes implied in the new document. In order for implementation to proceed, teachers require time to try out different activities, obtain feedback, reflect on their experiences and discuss concerns with other teachers. In general, teachers will progress, over time, from a day-to-day use of the document to a more sophisticated use. School climate should be supportive of implementation and resources and staff development opportunities should be readily available.

Program Review

A program review is planned to occur after several years of implementing a document. The main purpose of the review is to determine how effectively the key components of the document have been translated into school and classroom practice. As well as focusing on the degree of implementation, the review - where appropriate and feasible - will examine the effect of document implementation on students. Suggestions for curriculum renewal will also be documented. In addition, liaison will be maintained with Ministry of Education initiatives so that cooperative program reviews can be undertaken.

The Significance of the Plan

The Document Implementation Plan is a blueprint for ensuring that Ministry of Education documents are implemented in Simcoe County schools. As such, it is a system procedure. On the other hand, the Plan incorporates some of the basic tenets of effective implementation at the school and classroom level. The plan recognizes that principals and teachers need some system leadership in implementing Ministry of Education documents. It also views teachers as valued and capable professionals who will develop personal and meaningful strategies for implementing documents when given sufficient time and support.

The Document Implementation Plan is an important local initiative designed to help educators in Simcoe County implement Ministry of Education curriculum documents. The Plan provides a conceptual framework, a common language and a variety of strategies for implementing documents. Although it, hopefully, increases understanding and helps teachers provide quality learning opportunities for students, there are some key dilemmas that must be resolved.

Sources of Tension

The Ontario Ministry of Education is to be commended for positively contributing to the quality of education throughout the province. In an era of declining enrolment, fragmented community involvement, and scarce financial resources, the Ministry of Education has attempted to provide provincial direction while at the same time maintaining local responsibility. The Ontario approach to education is a sound one; it is well regarded within Ontario, across Canada and internationally. Nevertheless, there are inevitable tensions that arise from such an educational strategy.

Provincial Direction vs Local Responsibility

The main source of tension results from the very strategy of central direction coupled with local responsibility for implementation. From a political perspective, the government is seen to be taking action when it produces provincial curriculum documents and standards. The government has responded to its constituencies and consequently reaps the political rewards. On the other hand, local jurisdictions must deal with the problems associated with implementation activities. Increasing demands are being placed on diminishing local resources. Resulting dissatisfaction that may occur and concerns about implementation must be handled by the local board of education.

Public expectations and accountability are increasing. As might be expected, this has resulted in some disagreement among trustees, local councils and community groups. Implementing Bill 82, for example, has required funding, placement, and program decisions for exceptional students that has had a profound effect on other curriculum areas. Implementing second-language curriculum, in a county historically divided on the issue, has resulted in many emotion-filled meetings. And, dealing with a constantly increasing number of Ministry mandated curriculum

renewal projects, has meant that local decisions are often characterized by unresolved differences of opinion.

During the past several years, the Simcoe County Board of Education has undergone regular personnel and structural changes. The most recent reorganization occurred during April, 1986, with the creation of an Educational Services Department. The intent of this change was to accommodate better resource development, staff development and review services associated with implementation activities. In other words, government initiated change has not only generated local concerns, but has also resulted in concomitant organizational change to ensure compliance with Ministry policies. This local change has, in turn, contributed to general imbalance in the system.

Collective Agreements

The province has encouraged the growth of strong teachers' federations. Indeed, local jurisdictions are required to follow Bill 100, that is, the School Boards and Teachers Collective Negotiations Act. This means that school boards have the bulk of their budget pre-allocated for the salaries of teachers. It also means that working conditions such as pupil-teacher ratios are pre-established by collective agreements. In other words, the options available to school boards - when they consider how best to allocate resources and select strategies which support the implementation of Ministry policies - are severely limited.

In Simcoe County, for example, teachers are heavily involved in all phases of implementation. While this is a necessary strategy because of limited central office staff, it is also deemed a desirable implementation strategy. Nevertheless, some teachers believe that more central office staff should be hired. They argue that time spent on implementation activities is an extra

burden that detracts from classroom teaching. To increase central office staff, however, would mean additional cost to the local tax payer. Coupled with the fact that some teachers in the system are being declared surplus, as per collective agreements, there is a degree of uncertainty about how best to involve teachers in implementation activities.

In general, the provincial government has not adequately addressed the constraints imposed on boards by collective agreements. While it may appear that responsibility for and control of implementation belongs with the local board, the reality is that collective agreements often preclude certain courses of action.

Shifting Financial Responsibility

During the past decade, the provincial government has clearly shifted the tax burden to local municipalities. In Simcoe County, for example, local support for education has increased from approximately 38 percent in 1975 to approximately 52 percent in 1986. This has increased substantially the pressure on trustees. In order to meet local needs, a board may, for example, decide to increase its mill rate or substantially redirect resources so as to implement provincial standards. This, however, is entirely a local decision. As far as the provincial government is concerned, there is "no necessary relationship between expenditure levels and commitment to its policies". (Levin, 1984)

Since school trustees have discretionary control of approximately 10 percent of the overall budget, including program, it is not surprising that money for implementation activities is limited. Excluding salaries, approximately one-eighth of one percent of the overall budget was approved for county-wide implementation of activities in Simcoe County during 1986. Such limited financial resources at the local level give rise to a number of concerns.

Limited Resource Materials

A provincial government policy of central direction and local responsibility for implementation means that the Ministry of Education is not required to inject additional resources when a document is released. In fact, many Ministry documents, especially curriculum guidelines, arrive for implementation before supporting resource materials have been developed. The expectation is that local boards will develop their own resources to support implementation activities.

Many local jurisdictions do not have the money or manpower to produce quality second-generation resource documents. As a consequence, teacher concerns about the lack of resources remain high. And, as might be expected, until these concerns are acknowledged and resolved, the implementation process is jeopardized.

In Simcoe County there has been a shift away from large scale development of resource materials. While the process and the eventual product may be valuable for teachers, the cost is exorbitant. Instead, a general policy has emerged whereby second-generation resource documents are purchased from larger school boards. A good example of this is the evaluation support document produced by the Etobicoke Board of Education called **Making The Grade**. The senior high school English course of study co-operatively produced by the Association of Large School Boards in Ontario called **Writer's Craft** is another quality resource package. Unfortunately, however, this procedure means waiting until other boards choose to develop such resources. It also presumes that resources developed to meet the needs of other boards will meet local needs.

Further co-operative strategies are necessary. For example, opportunities for participating in shared resource development projects should be available to all boards, particularly those in adjacent geographical areas.

Number of Documents For Implementation

The number of Ministry documents that must be implemented in schools during the next few years is, to say the least, overwhelming. For example, in September, 1986, seven different Ministry guidelines will be in their first or second year of implementation. The task is exacerbated by the fact that within any one guideline there may be several different innovations that must be implemented. In addition, other Ministry documents are either being validated or reviewed. The system is confronted with a lot of curriculum change.

The workload and anxiety of teachers, especially those in grades 7 and 8, have noticeably increased. Teachers are concerned. While the direction of change is generally supported, teachers are beginning to challenge the wisdom and scheduling of curriculum renewal.

As a consequence, a number of formal and informal requests have been sent to the curriculum branch at the Ministry of Education. Specifically, the Ministry has been asked to carefully re-examine their schedule for releasing documents. Better co-ordination and timing is essential to minimize the burden placed on local boards.

At the same time, the Simcoe County Board of Education is establishing system priorities for implementation activities. A variety of other strategies are also being used to minimize implementation overload. For example, pilot schools have been identified to implement certain curriculum documents. Not only does this reduce teacher workload, but it also enables a few schools to identify early implementation difficulties and in some instances develop support materials that can then be shared throughout the system. In another instance, co-operative implementation activities based on networking and coaching strategies are being undertaken.

Time For Implementation

A related, yet distinct, source of tension is the timeline specified for implementing a particular document. In the early phases of recent curriculum renewal initiatives, the Ministry provided no, or limited, opportunities for validating draft documents. This meant that local boards suddenly received a new document for implementation. Often these documents had an adoption date that precluded time for planning. In other words, implementation was encouraged to begin as an event.

During the past few years, the time allocated for validation and planning activities has increased. This has subsequently allowed the system to become more aware of the requirements of a document and to initiate system-wide and school based planning activities. As a consequence, ownership, receptiveness to suggested changes, and motivation have tended to increase.

Efforts are now being made to ensure that implementation is viewed as a process over time. The Ministry is being encouraged to allow sufficient time for the system to progress from a day-to-day level of implementation to a more integrated approach that encourages creative adaptation of curriculum documents. Initiating program reviews after two or three years of implementation seems like a relatively short period. Finding the right balance will be a challenge.

Continual delays in the release of final curriculum documents has also had an impact on implementation. While apparently a trivial concern, unreasonable delays erode the interest and momentum achieved during validation activities.

Readiness For Implementation

Implementing a Ministry curriculum document requires "high level

curriculum development and implementation skills to put it into practice, and continual adjustments of programs are required". (Nightingale, 1986) Unfortunately, the Ministry of Education, through the regional office network, spent limited time with school boards to plan and prepare for implementation. The latest curriculum renewal projects began several years ago. Based on the number of current requests for our own board's implementation plan as well as comments from senior administrators and program staff at provincial meetings, it would appear that few boards have established implementation procedures. In addition, it would appear that expertise in curriculum implementation needs to be developed further.

Although recent Ministry curriculum documents appear to be of high quality, few are designed for immediate implementation. In most instances, Ministry documents do not provide suggestions for implementation. In addition, documents require a lot of work to make them implementable. Frequently, a careful analysis is required to clearly identify what, in fact, must be implemented.

Common policies seem to be appearing in recent Ministry guidelines. For example, evaluation of student achievement, problem-solving, language across the curriculum, and learning styles are discussed in most recent curriculum documents. In order to facilitate implementation, increase understanding in these areas, and minimize workload of teachers and administrators, it would appear that more detailed development of these areas seems warranted. In Simcoe County, attention is being given to these common themes. It would seem, however, that provincial curriculum documents would be much more implementable if the Ministry had developed (or were yet to develop) resource documents and offer regional in-service support in these areas.

Generally, it would seem as though the Ministry's own procedure for province-wide implementation is evolving over time. Many inconsistencies, lack of co-ordination and extra work might have

been eliminated with a more considered Ministry plan for implementation.

Accountability For Curriculum Implementation

Although the government provides centralized provincial direction of curriculum standards, the major responsibility for the provision of educational services rests with local boards. Currently, the Ministry ensures compliance to provincial policy through its well-developed network of regional offices. Co-operative evaluation projects and provincial reviews, for example, have been common methods used to monitor compliance with existing policies. Locally, some boards have used system-wide evaluations. In addition, interest groups, such as those that lobbied for special education, monitor implementation.

For approximately the past twenty years, Ontario has not had province-wide examinations. Since the introduction of the Ontario Assessment Instrument Pool in the late 1970's, there has been growing speculation about the possibility of re-introducing province-wide testing. The recent establishment of an evaluation branch at the Ministry has also indicated a government concern about monitoring the outcomes of schooling. Throughout the USA and Canada there is an increasing belief that the only way that elected officials can exercise some control over public education is through the use of common examinations. In Ontario, the future is still uncertain.

What seems to be apparent, however, is the government's desire to obtain better indicators of the effects of their policies. At the very least, this means a reorganization of provincial reviews and evaluation procedures.

What is unclear, however, is the impact that these activities will have on teacher supervision and evaluation at the local

level. Although the later issue is an unresolved dilemma in the Simcoe County implementation plan, what happens is closely linked to actions taken by the Ministry.

Although there are undoubtedly a number of other sources of tension, the eight mentioned above introduce the reader to some of the main issues. In most instances, the tensions can be associated with some resulting unrest or imbalance that occurs in the system. Tensions may also be attributed to the perceived coercive power that could be applied if local boards do not comply with Ministry directives. In general, sources of tension seem to be linked with differences of opinion, changes in behaviour, and situations of instability. Planning in a context of uncertainty also seems to generate tension.

Any discussion about sources of tension, however, should be seen in perspective. The intent here is to illuminate - to clarify issues so that constructive steps can be taken to improve the implementation process. As previously mentioned, Ontario has a sound strategy for education. The challenge, however, is to ensure that the Ministry and local boards work optimally to provide quality learning opportunities for all students.

Reflections on the Implementation Process

Many practitioners tacitly know how they are doing on the job; consciously or unconsciously they are involved in a process of reflecting about their work. Through such reflective activity, problems get reformulated and new actions are taken to improve the situation. (Schon, 1983)

Although the Simcoe County Board of Education has spent approximately two years developing the Document Implementation Plan, it was not officially used by the system until September,1985. As a consequence, it is premature to formally evaluate its

usefulness. Nevertheless, some personal reflections may serve to stimulate inquiry about the implementation process in a jurisdiction with modest program support staff. The following statements are presented as a concluding comment to this paper.

1. Although the Document Implementation Plan is constantly changing, it is difficult to make substantial changes to the goals and format - especially after the Plan has been published and formally endorsed for use in the system.

2. In the past, there has been a substantial degree of autonomy within the system when it came to the implementation of documents. As a consequence, it has become very clear that the Document Implementation Plan is an innovation that must also be implemented.

3. A provincial government policy of central direction and local responsibility for implementation makes it absolutely essential that open communication be nurtured and maintained between the Ministry of Education and the Board.

4. The validation and planning stages provide an excellent basis for increasing awareness, involving teachers and establishing a solid foundation for implementation activities; these initial stages rely on system leadership and initiative.

5. When a document contains a number of new concepts, the level of teacher anxiety and frustration appear to increase. Identification of teacher concerns must be followed by personal as well as professional support.

6. Within one document there are often several different innovations to be implemented. Frequently teachers, especially at the grades 7 and 8 levels, have several documents that must be implemented at the same time. As a consequence, implementation concerns get confused, workload increases, time becomes a scarce commodity, and frustration and stress increase.

7. With modest program support staff, it is essential to involve teachers, particularly through subject councils, in all phases of implementation. This has increased substantially the out-of-class activities of teachers, resulting in extra workload and stress. It appears as though the quality of in-school programs is also being affected. As a consequence, tolerance thresholds are being reached - even when supply teachers are provided. This may become a main concern for teachers' federations.

8. In general, teaching is an isolated activity and there is a pressure on principals and teachers to appear competent to

handle all problems that arise during implementation. This may result in some reluctance initially to share ideas about implementation, but usually small group discussions and networking result in valuable exchanges.

9. It is important to maximize the chances for successful implementation; there is a danger in starting to implement a document, e.g., validating and planning, and then leaving it to respond to the demands of other tasks or documents. Sustained assistance and determination seem to be necessary for successful implementation to occur.

10. With limited money available for program activities, it is essential that system priorities be established and reviewed on a regular basis. The effect of redirecting substantial program resources to one area requires careful monitoring and evaluation - particularly as it affects other system implementation efforts.

11. Boards of Education with limited central resources require access to relevant curriculum resources developed by larger jurisdictions, the Ministry and publishers.

12. At the implementation phase, it is crucial to trust the professionalism of teachers. Although teachers require central office support, e.g., through the provision of resources and staff development, it is essential that they know that they are viewed as capable and valued professionals.

13. The requirements and expectations identified in the implementation procedure should be incorporated as part of the criteria for teacher supervision and evaluation. The role of program support staff in teacher supervision and evaluation activities, however, requires careful consideration - especially as it relates to change facilitator activities.

14. It is easy to overestimate how well the implementation process will go with a well developed plan based on theory. Unpredictable events and unmanageable aspects of change are characteristics of the implementation process.

15. Rich descriptions of what successful implementation looks like are required. Various configurations and a range of different portrayals of quality document implementation, acceptable to the system, seem to facilitate the implementation process.

16. Program review can be demystified when it is made an integral part of the implementation process. Staff appear to be more accepting of the role of program review activities. Furthermore, establishing review criteria during implementation planning assists in clearly describing what, in fact, is being implemented.

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THE DOCUMENT IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FLOW CHART

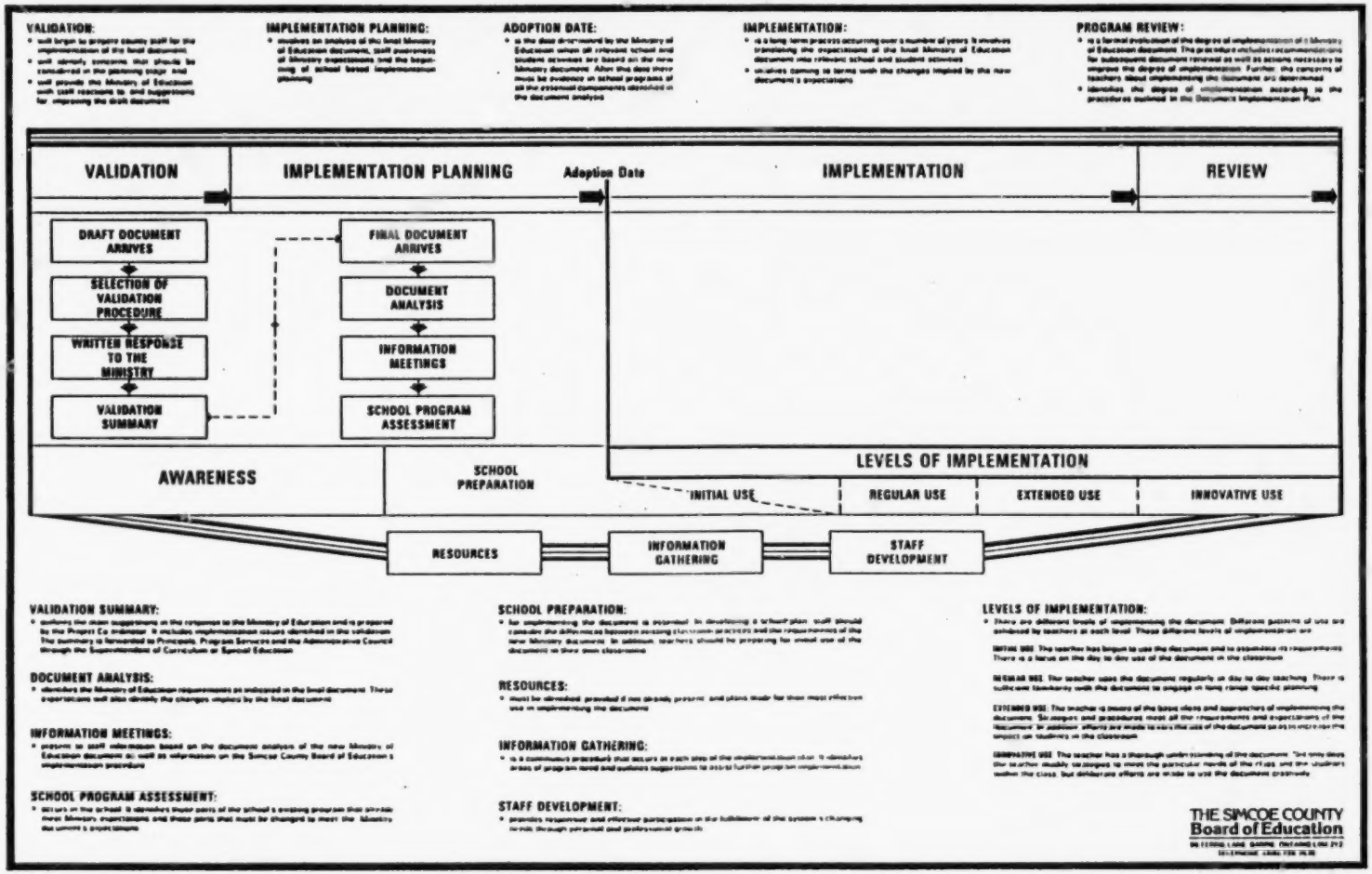

Figure 1

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